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Rob Gregson

Currently living in: Lancashire, England

Main works: "The Written World" - a series of two comic fantasy novels, starting with "Unreliable Histories."

I started writing because: I've written in one form or another throughout my professional life - technical writing, journalism, even a spot of speech-writing for one or two of the marginally less ghastly, environmentally-minded politicians. I made several attempts at a 'serious' fantasy novel in my late teens but quickly and quite rightly convinced myself it was dreadful. I then wrote a more conventional coming-of-age novel in my mid twenties but I gradually came to a very similar conclusion about it. I then devoted a good decade and a half to doing other things, including raising a family, so it wasn't until very recently that I returned to writing with anything approaching a proper sense of determination.

My main writing interests are: I think I'm only capable of writing comedy. I really struggle to remain serious about anything. (It might very well be a defence mechanism.) There are so many absurdities in modern life that I think my only other alternative would be to become a modern day pamphleteer - penning furious social commentaries that absolutely no one would read. Humour is probably a healthier option and it's certainly an instinctive leaning. If I read or write something - particularly if it has a sense of 'accepted wisdom' about it - I immediately want to start questioning it and taking it apart for re-assessment. It's an "Emperor's New Clothes" thing. The subject might be something as trivial as a common phrase or something that others take very seriously - such as a political or religious conviction. My writing therefore vacillates between the satirical and the just plain silly. At the moment, I seem to be focusing on poking fun at literary clichés. Since I read so much fantasy when I was younger, a comic fantasy seemed the most comfortable place to start.

My sources of research and information are: For the satirical elements, the evening news is always a good place to begin. The clichés, on the other hand, don't really need to be researched; they have a nasty habit of popping up everywhere. However, on the upside, that does mean I can watch a terrible film on TV and convince myself that I'm 'researching a genre.'

My inspiration comes from: I seem to like to make life difficult for myself so I try to start with some 'high concept' nonsense that will underpin the story as a whole. (Anyone who's read 'Unreliable Histories' and its sequel, 'The Endless Land' will understand what I mean by that.) Where those initial triggers come from, I have no idea, but I'd go looking for them if I knew where the little blighters were hiding out. After that, it's a matter of building the structure and populating it with ideas. That's the time-consuming bit. Now, for example, I have a concept and a broad plan for my next novel but I'm still waiting for enough ideas to come together to make it really interesting. Strangely, I always seem to do my best thinking when I'm mowing the lawn; no idea why. Perhaps it's the solitude, the repetitiveness and the distraction-blocking noise; maybe it creates some kind of Zen state or something. (I'm making this up as I go along.) The problem, of course, is that I only mow the lawn in the dry months of the year and, since I live in the North West of England, there really aren't very many of them.

My stories are planned like this: It starts with a lot of lawn mowing. (See above.) Eventually, after many weeks or many hundred metres - depending on your preferred measure - I'll have some sense of how the whole thing will work. I'll then scrap most of that when I put it all down on paper and realise that it makes little sense. More lawn mowing. Eventually, when the garden has been reduced to little more than compacted clay, I'll have a more or less workable plot. I don't plan the sub-plots. Somehow, they write themselves. Ideas inevitably crop up in the course of writing and they're bound to trigger ideas - e.g. "If I move this bit to here and introduce this bit earlier on, then I can do X with Y, and that would help later on with Z." The most annoying thing is when you have what you consider to be a really good idea just moments after finishing the complete first draft.

I have written a series of books based on: Cliché-busting in the fantasy genre. The two books together form a complete tale called 'The Written World.' It was always intended as a single story, which I subsequently decided to write as a two-part series. The first, 'Unreliable Histories' raises lots of questions and challenges, and not all of them are fully resolved in its final chapters. There's a climax and there are some important discoveries to be made but that's the point at which the story gets a lot bigger and the characters begin to appreciate the scale of what's going on. 'The Endless Land' is where all the remaining mysteries are solved and where the proper 'high concept' stuff can happen. Philosophy, piracy and apocalypse are all thrown into the mix.

My future plans are to: Spreading out, for sure. Part of the point of 'The Written World' is that it sets up a platform for crossing genres. There are only so many clichés and conventions to be parodied in the fantasy genre so now I think it's time I started looking further afield.

My own favourite character is: There's a deranged wizard called Nevigorn who was great fun to write. He's not at all convinced that the world he inhabits is real, so he has a very eccentric view of morality and what constitutes acceptable behaviour. He might be my favourite, although there's a ludicrously powerful demon that appears in 'The Endless Land.' He was good fun, too, because his motivations are so ambiguous.

I sometimes find myself thinking like: The ludicrously powerful demon, obviously. And Nevigorn, too, some days. Actually, no. Not any of them, really. My main character, Myrah, is too dynamic and energetic to be anything like me.

I also have a few other books I'd like to highlight as follows: No. Shan't. The old ones were rubbish and the new one is still in my head. All I'll reveal is that it might just possibly involve Samuel Taylor Coleridge and a foul-mouthed squirrel.

My advice to new writers would be: If you're serious about it, seek advice from more experienced authors than I. The best advice I can offer is to write as much as you can, gain experience and engage with lots of other writers to get their feedback. Not all of it will be great but a lot of it will be very useful indeed, and it will show you things about your own work that you could never have recognised on your own.

Writing has its ups and downs: It's time-consuming, hard work and the editing process can sometimes feel like cutting away your own flesh. Most authors make very little money from it and the amount of competition now is just insane. On the other hand, it can be great fun; when you've developed your characters, reading and writing them can feel like spending time with old friends. Personally, I have really enjoyed sharing ideas and feedback with other writers. There are some brilliant and wonderfully supportive people out there.

When I'm not writing: I'm trying to find time to do everything else. Work seems to take up most of the time, which is a shame. It leaves precious little time for walking, scuba diving, photography and wild swimming, which is how I'd ideally like to be spending most of my free time.

For copy editing and proofreading: My wife has a great eye for typos but, in a professional capacity, I've done quite a lot of proof-reading myself so I think I'm probably better-than-average at spotting them. However, having a network of friendly indie authors to call upon is a fantastic thing and I owe so many of them for their help.

I accept criticism from: Anyone. The tricky bit is judging how seriously to take it - and that, of course, depends on the criticism. Much of it is invaluable; I put my first book on Authonomy, where it was reviewed by scores of literate and intelligent people. Some of them gave me feedback that was superbly useful, and on the strength of it, I went back through my drafts and made countless changes - cutting out superfluous content, clarifying certain bits, emphasising others. Every now and again, you're bound to get some spiteful comments and I can't honestly say that I can just brush them off and crack on. I wish I could.

My experiences with self-publishing: I put footnotes in my novels, which, in terms of preparation and formatting, made life a lot harder than it absolutely needed to be. Otherwise, publishing on Amazon was easy enough and it certainly made the whole thing feel more 'real' when I saw the books on sale for the first time. There haven't been any obvious low points as yet. Some promotions haven't been as effective as I'd hoped but that's hardly a tear-jerker. The hardest challenge, I think, is not so much the publishing as all the promotional work that needs to follow it. Finding time to be a writer and an effective publicist is virtually impossible.

I promote my books via: Social media, mainly. But I don't do anything like enough real promotion. Partly that's because I keep convincing myself that I need to do 'one last edit' before it's truly, finally, absolutely ready for release. (That's also the reason I haven't committed to producing the books in hard copy yet.) Sooner or later, though, I'll have to walk away from the two novels and declare them as ready as they can be. Then, I'll have to find some workable balance between writing, marketing and all the other parts of my life. Time's the real constraint. Fitting things in around work and other commitments, I probably spent at least four or five years writing the novels, and I've spent the last year or so editing and promoting them. My next novel hasn't really got a look-in yet. I've got a folder full of notes but that's all. (In fact, I'm going to read other authors' answers to this same question and then copy them because I haven't got the balance right at all.)

My favourite mainstream authors are: Most of them are dead. (What does that say about me, I wonder?) Amongst those that aren't: Bill Bryson, Stephen Fry and (surprisingly) Derren Brown. There's a lot of wit, kindness and humanity in what they write.

I am currently reading: I'm reading lots of indie authors at the moment - either beta-reading or just reading for fun. I read those on the Kindle, but I'm also reading a paperback copy of *Raw Spirit* by the much-missed Iain Banks - another one who was strong on wit and humanity.

I prefer to read books in: Kindle or paperback - I don't mind.

A bit about my other interests: I'm strangely tolerant of cold water so I can quite happily swim in rivers and waterfalls between April and October. As a result, I often combine fell walking - in the Lake District or the Yorkshire Dales - with a quick swim. I'm also keen on scuba diving and photography - but only very rarely at the same time.

My most unattainable ambition is: Oh, it's hard to rank them; I'm pretty certain that all my ambitions are unattainable. But if we're talking really unattainable (in a kite-surfing-with-dinosaurs sort of way) then I'd like to change the world. I'd quite like to be the guy who finds a way to convince people to focus on being nice to one another, instead of dwelling on their particular superstitions and prejudices. It's that "imagine there's no heaven" thing that Mr Lennon spoke about; it would be good if people would invest a bit more effort in making this life more pleasant rather than thinking so much about the next.

Last thoughts before we go down the pub/club/library/boot-sale/exercise yard: There are pubs, clubs and all those other things? They sound great. Let's go...

Author Links

Website: <http://nullroom.blogspot.co.uk/>

Amazon Author page: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Rob-Gregson/e/B00J7WKM2S>

Twitter: @RobGregsonWords

Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/rob.gregson.words) rob.gregson.words

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